

- ☑ Job well done, says former wing commander (back page)
- ☑ Marines come home by way of Baghdad (back page)
- ☑ Armed Forces Day is May 17!



A big welcome for our Security Forces

Family and friends welcome home SMSgt. Michael Grady (above), TSgt. Christopher Mazzei (left) and SSgt. John Shepard of the 439th Security Forces Squadron last Tuesday. The three security specialists came home after three months of helping provide defense at a desert air base in the Iraqi Freedom AOR.

—photos by MSgt. Tom Allocco and SSgt. Andrew Biscoe

Patriots at center of Baghdad action

by MSgt. Tom Allocco

Patriot Wing members are serving at the “heart of the universe” in the war against terrorism, according to the senior Westover officer at Iraq’s Baghdad airport.

Lt. Col. James led an 11-member 439th Airlift Control Flight team to the newly liberated Iraqi capital in late April. Also serving at the airport are 13 security specialists of the 439th Security Forces Flight, two members of the Wing Intelligence shop and a Finance specialist.

Living conditions are so basic at the airport that his airlift control team was looking forward to stepping up to the relative comfort of a tent city which would be set up within a week or two, Lt. Col. James said last weekend. The Westover airlift specialists have set up a Tactical Airlift Control Element which is handling all air flow missions at the Baghdad

airport.

“This is the best operational thing we’ve ever seen in the history of the 439th ALCF...this is a very high visibility...there is so much going on it is unbelievable,” the ALCF commander said.

He noted that distinguished visitors coming to the airport include Air Force Gen. Richard B. Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Gen. Eric K. Shinseki, Army chief of staff. Retired Army Lt. Gen. Jay M. Garner, administrator of Iraq, is a frequent visitor, as well as senior State Department officials.

The Baghdad airport is the center of air operations to deploy troops and deliver the humanitarian aid needed to rebuild the country.

Among the Westover members deployed to Baghdad, the perception is that “this is the heart of the universe, where it is all happening,” Lt. Col. James said.

Just knowing that they are players in events

of worldwide significance is a morale booster for Patriot Wing members serving in Baghdad. “There are high spirits. You don’t get an opportunity like this often. This is the real deal,” Lt. Col. James said.

“They’re doing a great job, supporting the mission,” is his assessment of the 439th AW security, airlift, intelligence and finance specialists serving in Baghdad. The prestige is compensation for austere living conditions and long hours in a hot and dusty climate.

Lt. Col. James said improvements were underway, but living conditions were “like camping.” They still had no hot meals. The airlift control specialists were living on three MRE’s a day, “if you choose to eat that many,” he said.

They were living in hardened facilities and looking forward to moving into tents. There was no power or water in the housing. They had

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439th AW MISSION: Actively support national objectives on a global scale with ready, mobility forces

Patriots in Iraq... (cont. from page 1)

outdoor showers and no hot water.

The airport is built on the model of the Charles DeGaulle Airport, Paris, and has a very large terminal. The Army captured the airfield and terminal in a few days of fighting and they are largely intact.

The cross taxiways still have bomb damage which is being repaired by Air Force civil engineer rapid runway repair specialists. Iraqi contractors are bringing in truckloads of gravel for the repair. The Royal Australian Air Force is operating the control tower and there are some British RAF airmen at the field.

Although the large scale fighting is over, there is still the ever present awareness of being in a combat zone. There are still sniper and RPG (rocket propelled grenade) skirmishes and fighting between Iraqi factions.

Two American soldiers were killed last week in attacks in Baghdad. Another was injured by a mine. Aircraft coming in frequently dispense flares due to the threat assessment.

The Patriot Wing members, like others, keep their weapons with them 24 hours a day and carry the weapons when they move around the airport.

A mobile aeromedical staging facility at the airport evacuates patients every day, including soldiers injured in a recent non-combat helicopter crash.

The air field is split between military and humanitarian/civilian operations. Westover's

airlift control specialists are performing a mission similar to the one some of them performed at King Khalid Military City, Saudi Arabia, in 1991. They are airlifting out troops and equipment and bringing in fresh replacements. Just underway, is the airlift home of some of the 3rd Infantry Division soldiers who were in the spearhead of the drive to Baghdad.

Humanitarian missions come in 24 hours a day, since the arrival of Red Cross, NGO (non-government organizations) and government officials. Aid is being delivered from worldwide sources to restore hope to the Iraqi people and rebuild the country's infrastructure.

The airlift control specialists don't know how long they will be in Baghdad, but expect it will be at least until an operations support squadron sets up a command post.

In the meantime, living conditions are improving and "the days pass by very quickly. All the people here from the 439th have their eyes squarely on the mission. They know why they are here," Lt. Col. James said.

Former wing commander gives Patriot pat on back

Former Patriot Wing commander, Maj. Gen. James P. Czekanski visited Westover last Friday and applauded wing members on a job well done.

"Congratulations on the level of work you have done. It's great to come back here. ...the men and women of Westover can rise to any challenge. Thanks so very much for what you have accomplished. You did a fantastic job. I couldn't be more proud," Czekanski said.

The former wing commander serves as commander of 4th Air Force at March ARB, Calif., a command which includes aircraft in the continental U.S., Hawaii and Guam. While here he expressed appreciation for the Patriot Wing's good relationship with his maintainers from Lackland AFB who are serving here.

The 4th Air Force commander served as 439th AW commander from 1992 to 1997. He was named to his present command in August, 2000.

Czekanski's visit to Westover coincide with an engagement as guest speaker at an University of Massachusetts ROTC Dining Out.

Express-ions



Marines come home by way of Baghdad

by MSgt. Tom Allocco

For nine Marine Air Wing members, a stop at the Westover Passenger Terminal was the last leg in a long journey home for their unit which started in southern Iraq and passed through Baghdad. They are from a helicopter group which provided close air support for Marines in the slugging match from Basra to Baghdad. Their Hueys also provided small unit insertion and casualty evacuation.

The Marines of Marine Aircraft Group 39 of I Marine Expeditionary Force deployed with their helicopter gunship Cobras and Hueys from Camp Pendleton, Calif. to the Enduring Freedom AOR in January. Among them was Cobra pilot Capt. Justin Eggstaff, call-sign "Eggs," who was in the Passenger Terminal last Thursday.

He described their war as day and night flying as Marines moved to Basra, Nasiriyah, Kut and Baghdad. The mission of Eggstaff and the other Cobra and Huey pilots was "destroying targets of opportunity. ...if something was bogging them (Marine ground forces) down, we'd take care of that."

The gunships would fly to a forward operating base, refuel and sit on strip alert awaiting orders.

Eggstaff remembers the day they pulled down Saddam's statue, but that's not how the war ended for him. On his last day of combat an Iraqi shot at his Cobra with an AK 47.

"One day they just stopped shooting. One day you were going up north destroying things and the next day they didn't anything for you to kill," he said.

Free ride to see James Taylor

Services Squadron will offer free bus rides to the James Taylor Tanglewood concert on Tuesday, June 24. Concert tickets will be \$21 for the lawn.

Sign-ups for the bus trip will be taken at the Fitness Center through Friday, May 16. Seating is limited. For more information, call TSgt. Neal Normandin at the Fitness Center at Ext. 3958.

Pat Stats

Served since Feb. 2, 2003
5,240 passengers --- 1,816 aircraft
18,783,162 pounds of cargo
Info from MSgt. Jim Garrity, 42APS

Meals
10,730 hot meals served
Box lunches: 4,652
Info from MSgt. David Beauregard, 439SVS

Fuel since Feb.1
11,401,773 gallons of JP-8
Info from Jim Maloney, Fuels

PATRIOT *express*

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Security guidelines prohibit using last names of deploying reservists.)

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